**The meaning of Israel on her 60th anniversary - a personal view.**

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| letter to Israel   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | - [Miscellaneous](http://www.jewishmag.com/jimmenu/misc1.htm) - [Recipies](http://www.jewishmag.com/jimmenu/recipies.htm) | Therefore Choose Life  By William Rabinowtiz  *Long winds of time have blown away the footprints of the past:*  *So many dreams, so many ideals and hopes,*  *Forgotten memories.*  *Not knowing or wishing to know, we live in a separate today,*  *Comfortable,*  *Believing that our tomorrow,*  *Will never be as it was yesterday.*  How naïve.  William Rabinowitz[1](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE)  ***It was another cold night. I sat over a heavy gun staring into the darkness of the Sinai hoping that what my active imagination thought it saw was not there. What in the hell was I doing here? The answer was obvious. I was here because Egypt was in front of me and Tel Aviv was behind me.***  ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~~  Born an American in January of 1948, I was shaped by a reality, a past, that was un-American. From the recently ended Jewish night of the Holocaust my parents, survivors of Ravensbruck, Bergen Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, had met and married (1946) in the Displaced Person's Camp of Landsburg Am Lech. My father was employed as the German/English translator for the American commandant, Col. Rosenthal. His lucky choice, as so many lucky choices that saved one Jewish life or another during the Holocaust, was to have studied English before the war in his native Vienna. There was never an option to return to Vienna or to my mother's home of Lodz. There was nothing to return to.  *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;" Deut. 30:19*  Their choices in life were few and murky. Palestine was an option, but they were not Zionists. The doors, to that hopeful but foreboding refuge, were closed by the heartlessness of the British and the visible death wishes of the Arab world. My father had an Aunt who immigrated to America in the early thirties, her husband, a Jewish military officer in the Austrian army, had died under mysterious circumstances.  Sponsorship papers were obtained from America and my mother, now pregnant in 1947, awaited their number to be advanced for the voyage across the ocean. It soon became obvious that their embarkation would not come before my birth. My father desperately did not want me to be born a German. He approached Col. Rosenthal. Col. Rosenthal, himself a Jew, understood and agreed. Their embarkation date was advanced and they arrived in Washington, D.C. Nov. of 1947. I was born in January, a child of two worlds.  ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~  **Theodor Herzl's** message of Jewish national self-emancipation quickly carried to American shores. The ideas took hold and flowered first amidst the immigrating teeming masses of Russian, Polish and Lithuanian Jewry, not in New York as expected, but in Chicago, Illinois. The Chicago Zion Society was founded. It was very small and very marginal in its influence. However, the Midwestern American landscape had already been furrowed and fertilized for Zionism, not by Jews, but by a Christian fundamentalist, a restorationist, William Blackstone. His belief was centered in his faith.  *"In 1891, Blackstone drew up a petition calling for the creation of a national homeland in Palestine for the 2 million oppressed Jews of Russia. "According to God's distribution of nations," Blackstone's petition read, "[Palestine] is their home – an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. … Let us now restore them to the land of which they were so cruelly despoiled by our Roman ancestors. More than 400 prominent individuals signed Blackstone's appeal, including the publisher of the Chicago Tribune and Melville W. Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. The petition was submitted to President Benjamin Harrison."* *[2](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm" \l "FOOTNOTE)*  The Federation of American Zionists (FAZ), the first major Zionist organization in America was founded in New York in 1896. It struggled mightily to barely survive. The first president of the Federation was Richard Gottheils, a reluctant leader, an important figurehead, as a respected professor of Semitic Languages at Columbia University. After 13 years of existence, amidst a Jewish population of over 2,000,000 the FAZ could barely count only 10,000 members.  Active Zionist membership was minimal though sympathies might have been much larger. American Jews simply did not want to get involved. The Jews, the vast majority of whom were recent immigrants, unsure of their place in America, were focused not on wishful dreams of a return to Zion. They focused on finding for themselves and their own their personal economic Promised Land. They feared rocking the boat of American toleration, disturbing their unbelievable newfound dream.  Louis Brandeis, an improbable choice, a descendent of Frankists, was an assimilated Jew from Kentucky. He had had little formal association with Jews being more closely identified with the Brahmanism of the Bostonian social elite. Ironically, Louis Brandeis, the future Supreme Court Justice (1916), became the energetic exponent in word and deed, the legitimizer of American Zionism.  Under Brandeis' leadership, the American Zionist movement grew to over 200,000 members by 1920. Zionism became a respected word, reflecting American ideals, in common households, the halls of Congress and up to the Presidency.  There were a number of factors to explain the rise of American Zionism under Brandeis. World War I was a key factor. Contemporary history is focused on the Holocaust and its aftermath. Forgotten is the reality of the mini – Holocaust of European Jews during World War I. The slaughter of hundreds of thousand of Eastern European Jews for simply being Jews was not lost on the American Jewish community. American Jews were keenly aware that the American escape valve had been nearly sealed. It would soon be fully cut off to Jewish refugees. The recent immigrants anguished over their families' traumas in Europe and were distraught with powerlessness. Zionism was an answer.  The acculturation of American Jewry to America and its values was another reason for the sharp rise of American Zionism. For the first time it was safe, it was o.k., it was responsible to stand up and protest Jewish oppression. It was proper to promote Jewish self-interest, as did many other American immigrant groups such as the Irish, the Germans and the Italians.  Brandeis did something that was unique. He framed Zionism, not as a purely Jewish or European need but as an American ideal.  Emma Lazarus, the great American Jewish poet:  "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"[3](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE)  America was the lamp to the ancient lands. American ideals, freedom, democracy, were the moral export to the world.  Brandeis wrote:  *"The Zionist movement is idealistic…*  *America's fundamental law seeks to make real the brotherhood of man. That brotherhood became the Jewish fundamental law more than twenty-five hundred years ago.*  *America is full of nationalities, which, while accepting with enthusiasm their new American citizenship, nevertheless look to some center in the old world as the source and inspiration of their national culture and traditions.*  *There is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry. The Jewish spirit, the product of our religion and experiences, is essentially modern and essentially American….*  *Shall we voluntarily yield to anti-Semitism, and instead of solving our "problem" end it by noble suicide? Surely this is no time for Jews to despair. Let us make clear to the world that we too are a nationality striving for equal rights to life and to self-expression.*  *They believe that only in Palestine can Jewish life be fully protected from the forces of disintegration; that there alone can the Jewish spirit reach its full and natural development; and that by securing for those Jews who wish to settle there the opportunity to do so, not only those Jews, but all* *Jews will be benefited, and that the long perplexing Jewish Problem will, at fast, find solution.*  *The ghetto walls are now falling. Jewish life cannot be preserved and developed, assimilation cannot be averted, unless there be reestablished in the fatherland a center from which the Jewish spirit may radiate and give to the Jews scattered throughout the world that inspiration which springs from the memories of a great past and the hope of a great future. – A Call to the Educated Jew*  *And since death is not a solution of the problem of life, the solution of the Jewish Problem necessarily involves the continued existence of the Jews as Jews. – Brandeis- the Jewish Problem*  *We seek to protect as individuals those constituting a minority; but we fail to realize that protection cannot be complete unless group equality also is recognized".[4](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm" \l "FOOTNOTE)*  *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;" Deut. 30:19*  Brandeis understood that American ideals and Zionist ideals were parallel. America offered a solution to the problems of oppression in the world. Zionism offered a solution to the Jewish problem in the world. Immigrants teemed to America because they choose the blessing of life not death. Jews chose to come to America because they too chose life. For those Jews who could not come to America, death or voluntary suicide was not an option, Zionism was.  The Zionist Organization of America conducted a survey of the American War Congress of 1918. Brandeis has a significant influence but what was especially amazing was the natural American understanding of support of Jewish aspirations. The American War Congress overwhelmingly supported Zionist ideals. American ideals affirmed support for national self-determination of many small peoples yearning to be free, such as the Armenians, the Belgians, the Greeks and the Jews.  Congressional views affirmed American Jews as good American citizens with legitimate concerns and values for their fellow Jews living under clouds of anti-Semitism. The American War Congress of 1918 was survey by the Zionist Organization of America as to their opinions of and the meaning of, the Balfour Declaration.  They wrote:  **Senator Lawrence Y. Sherman, Of Illinois.**  **"*I do not, of course, expect that large numbers of Jews will leave this country, where they have all the advantages of our enlightened institutions, to live in Palestine, but I believe that it will satisfy a longing that has never ceased to exist through their struggle during all these centuries."***  **Senator Le Baron B. Colt, of Rhode Island**  ***"I believe that the establishment of such a Home will tend to unify and crystallize the Jewish national spirit and yet at the same time will not in any degree detract from that loyalty to America and American institutions so characteristic of the Jewish people."***  **Senator Reed Smoot, of Utah.**  ***"The great opportunity thus offered will be a healing balm to the hearts of hundreds, of thousands, and perhaps millions, of scattered Hebrews in all parts of the world. ……***  ***This re-establishment of their people, or a portion of them, in a self-governing community under the protection of a great free empire, will add a new source of strength and inspiration to the world."***  **Representative Richard P. Freeman of Connecticut**  ***"Whether or not a Jewish nation can be created or re-established in Palestine depends upon the Jews who are willing to make it their home and their country"***  **Representative Addison T. Smith, of Idaho**  **"*Returning of God's ancient people to the 'Promised Land. The Ruler of the universe is demonstrating to the world that His word is something more than a "Scrap of paper."***  **Representative Niels Juul, of Illinois**  "***I favor Zionism because I look upon the Jewish, situation as I look upon the Belgian situation. Jews were dispossessed of their home by force and, in spite of that force they have managed to preserve through the centuries a language,* a *literature, and a religion."***  **Representative Adolph J. Sabath, of Illinois**  ***"Breathes there a Jew with soul so dead that it no longer reverberates with the sound of hope for a reconstructed 'Homeland' whence once again Israel may send forth his ideals, his literature and his philosophy for the further enlightenment of the world?"***  **Representative William E. Cox, of Indiana**  ***"I am sure that in the course of time Zionism will embrace not only all the members of the Jewish faith and nation, but also all other peoples who will have had an opportunity to learn about its purposes and principles."***  **Representative Louis W. Fairfield, Indiana**  ***"In the eternal fitness of things every race should have a country unless it is willing to lose its identity to that country which it may happen to be resident."***  **Representative Gilbert A. Currie, Michigan**  ***"I am fully aware of the fact that only a very small percentage of the American Jews will return to their ancient national home in Palestine, nor is it necessary or desirable that American Jews should return. However, for those who will return from other countries it surely will be a blessing and the realization of a life-long dream, and to those who will remain in those countries where they have already become acclimatized, it will undoubtedly cause much pride and happiness to know that once for all the Jewish flag is to wave in the historic City of Jerusalem."***  **Representative J. Hampton Moore, of Pennsylvania**  ***"There will be reason to rejoice when it can no longer be said of the Jew that he is a man without a country."***  **John M. Morin – Pennsylvania**  **"*It seems to me that any Jew who is a Zionist must be not alone a better Jew for that fact, but also a better American… I can not see how anybody, Jewish or non-Jewish, can be opposed to Zionist supporting the liberty of his own great and distinguished race in the world, while at the same time not in the slightest impairing the loyalty which he owes first and above all to America."***  **David G. Classon – Wisconsin**  ***"Know that few of the Jews of the liberal countries would go back to Palestine, but all of them in every land would realize with pride and joy that a Jewish flag floated over a state which was Jewish in language and religion and where those of their faith and nationality who desired to go there, might live in happiness and in peace." [5](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm" \l "FOOTNOTE)***  **Sept 12, 1922, the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding, signed Congressional joint resolution mirroring the Balfour Declaration.**  ***"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the United States of America favors the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of Christian and all other non-Jewish communities in Palestine, and that the Holy places and religious buildings and sites in Palestine shall be adequately protected."***  **~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~**  Like most young people born into the heady days of the young state of Israel – it seemed like a miracle had taken place. My earliest memories were dancing a hora at the Washington, D.C. Jewish Community Center to the words of *Dovid Melech Yisrael, Chai, Chai, V'kayom*, - a little paper Israeli styled hat – bouncing on my head - and one hand trying to keep it on. It was cute in 1953. The Yeshivah I attended; Jewish history ended with the destruction of the second Temple and began again with the state of Israel. There was nothing in between.  Growing up a child of survivors you knew that you were different. Your family was small, not many cousins, Aunts or Uncles. I had no grandparents. My parents spoke in a strange language. They had heavy accents that we did not hear but others did. We associated with others who were survivors because they understood what American born and raised Jews could not.  It was at a book fair that I first saw the bright red covered book. That book, I must have read twenty times over and over. "Jews Fight Too," by Mac Davis. The book was something unreal. Jews fight. Jews stood up against evil; Jews defended themselves against hate and death. Jews chose to fight for life against death. As a child of survivors the book was an inspiring ideal. Jewish children whose parents had been soldiers in World War II could not understand; their parents had been soldiers, mine had been slaves. Their parents chose to fight for life, mine… the Nazis and their friends had chosen for death.  Perhaps it was because I was classified as 1-Y at Ft. Holabird in Baltimore, that the need to be part of "never again" took hold. A college sports injury had the American army classify me as unfit for service except in a national emergency. A sense of duty, obligation, honor, dignity, respect, preservation and hope for a better world for all Jews was and all people would be unfulfilled. It was Herzl's vision that the land of Israel would a model. If the world did not want us then we would have our own State and demonstrate to an un-wanting world how Jewish energy unleashed could make the world better for all.  My father had died years earlier, finally succumbing to injuries he had suffered as a slave laborer under the Nazis, eventually developing a melanoma where he was bayoneted and left for dead during the death march to Buchenwald. Someone had picked him up. Someone would not leave him, a fellow Jew, behind. My mother was living in an American Jewish Home for the aged, cared and looked after. She would die in later years believing that the Nazi's were coming to finish the job.  I had made the usual college trips to Israel. I had marched in parades and demonstrations for Civil Rights but I had done nothing for my people, the Jewish people. Simply putting on Teffilin in the morning was not doing enough to preserve my people. A friend, recently returned from Israel, opened a door to opportunity. My friend had been a member of Mahal.  Mahal, Meetnadvim M'Chutz L'Artez, Volunteers from outside of Israel, was formed in 1946-1948. They were a corp of foreign volunteers who came to Israel to help defend her and fight for her freedom. Many returned to their homes after the war of Independence, many are still there sleeping amongst the honored of Israel's fallen.  My course was set. My direction was determined. I volunteered for what was at the time a residual of Israel's past and kept quiet – I became a private in the Israeli army. My unit was comprised of other members of Mahal – Argentineans, South Africans, Brits, Poles, and me. All of us were alone, no family, except all of Israel. We had a sense of being one people – strangers, living at the pleasure and toleration of others in far lands, no longer.  A story my mother told me played in my mind. In Lodz, she had been beaten up and called a Jew whore by local boys who stole her sweater. I was part of something that would never let that happen again.  We were proud in our uniforms and others were proud to see us. On a training march from Machaneh Shmonim, three hundred of us, Israelis and my small Mahal contingent, marched out across the hills. It was a stunning scene not for the Israelis for whom soldiers marching were nothing new, a necessity. Three tour buses, filled with American Federation Mission tourists, stopped on the road to gawk at us. They piled out taking our pictures. Their breasts visibly swelled with pride as we three hundred marched by.  My first station was Machaneh Dotan near Nablus in the West Bank. We lived in a captured Jordanian military camp next to the unexcavated Tel Dotan. In the valley before us was where Joseph's brothers had thrown him into a pit. He was sold to a passing caravan and carried away to become a slave in Egypt. Here I was, a soldier in a Jewish army, the first in two thousand years and I was not a slave. Further training sent me to the coast near Caesarea. It was there that the terrible news came. We were standing in a tent in the middle of nothing but sand, the hills of Sharon stood behind us and the Mediterranean lapped the shores to our front. The radio solemnly read the horrifying news of the Munich massacre. One guy wanted to do down to the main road and kill Arabs in revenge. We all stopped him, the reason, I have never forgotten. "That is what the Nazis would do,' we hollered. 'We are Jews. We are not Nazis. We cannot do that." The pain settled in. We quietly sat down and cleaned the sand from our guns.  I was transferred to Nahal Yam on the North coast of the Sinai not far from the Suez Canal. To this day, I remember seeing the huge berms being built on the Egyptian side of the canal. Behind the berms they prepared for the coming sudden attack across the canal, the Yom Kippur War. To this day, it has been hard to understand why Golda Meir's government could not see the war preparations of the Egyptians. I saw them in front of me. It may have been a cynical but realistic decision; if Israel had preemptively attacked Egypt the Americans could not or would not support us in the ensuing war. We had to take the Egyptian's first strike. We did. Tiny Israel lost over 2,000 dead and the world still hated us. The United States did support Israel after the attack that almost broke Israel. In Nahal Yam, I sat over a heavy gun staring into the darkness of the Sinai hoping that what my active imagination thought it saw was not there. What in the hell was I doing here? The answer was obvious. I was here because Egypt was in front of me and Tel Aviv was behind me.  Nahal Yam is gone now. Israel transferred the buffer zone of the Sinai for a piece of paper and a promise from the Egyptians for peace. Remarkably, it has been almost thirty years and a cold peace has held.  As with many of the Mahalniks, I returned to the U.S. and began a new life. My mother was still living and she needed additional attention and care. My world and relation to Israel became, as it was for most American Jews, one of cultural and spiritual affiliation.  I married and had three sons. My sons have never understood the meaning of the *Jewish Problem*. They have never understood, except intellectually, the normality they enjoy is the gift of Herzl.  Henry Wickham Steed, a non-Jew, wrote in 1913:  *"Zionism came with the force of an evangel. To be a Jew and to be proud of it; to glory in the power and pertinacity of the race, its traditions, its triumphs, its sufferings its resistance to persecution; to look the world frankly in the face and to enjoy the luxury of moral and intellectual honesty; to feel pride in belonging to the people that gave Christendom its divinities, that taught half the world monotheism, whose ideas have permeated civilization as never the ideas of a race before it, whose genius fashioned the whole mechanism of modern commerce, and whose artists, actors, singers and writers have filled a larger place in the cultured universe than those of any other people. This, or something like this, was the train of thought fired in youthful Jewish minds by the Zionist spark.*  *Its effect upon the Jewish students of Austrian universities was immediate and striking. Until then they had been despised and often ill-treated. They had wormed their way into appointments and into the free professions by dint of pliancy, mock humility, mental acuteness, and clandestine protection. If struck or spat upon by 'Aryan' students, they rarely ventured to return the blow or the insult. But Zionism gave them courage. They formed associations, and learned athletic drill and fencing. Insult was requited with insult, and presently the best fencers of the fighting German corps found that Zionist students could gash cheeks quite as effectually as any Teuton, and that the Jews were in a fair way to become the best swordsmen of the university. Today the purple cap of the Zionist is as respected as that of any academical association.*  *'This moral influence of Zionism is not confined to university students. It is quite as noticeable among the mass of the younger Jews outside, who also find in it a reason to raise their heads, and, taking their stand upon the past, to gaze straightforwardly into the future."[6](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm" \l "FOOTNOTE)*  What does Israel mean on its 60th anniversary. The meaning is worth reiterating the words of David Classon, Congressman from Wisconsin (1918).  Jews in many lands "*would realize with pride and joy that a Jewish flag floated over a state which was Jewish in language and religion and where those of their faith and nationality who desired to go there, might live in happiness and in peace.****"***  Israel is the choice of the Jewish people given to us by God. We are free to choose life or death, spiritually or physically. It is our duty to protect her from within and from without. We choose life.  L'Chaim.  [1](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm" \l "FOOTNOTE 1) William Rabinowitz, **American Zionism**, 2006 private papers, Boynton Beach. Fl.  [2](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE 2) *http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/chicago.html*  [3](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE 3) The New Colossus, Emma Lazarus, New York, 1883  [4](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE 4) *Brandeis on Zionism – A Collection of Address and Statements by Louis D. Brandeis, Zionist Organization of America, Washington, D.C.*  [5](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE 5) ***Quotes from - American War Congress of 1918, Zionist Organization of America - 1919***  [6](http://www.jewishmag.com/124mag/israel-60th/israel-60th.htm#FOOTNOTE 6) *Henry Wickham Steed, the Hapsburg Monarchy, London, Fourth Edition, 1919, pp. 175-76* |  | |